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CHARLES STARRETT as
the DURANGO KID
No. 12
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The DURANGO KID

THE HIGHWAY GREYHOUNDS OF THE EARLY DAYS WERE THE STAUNCH STAGECOACHES THAT CARRIED MAIL AND PASSENGERS ACROSS THE LAND. THE BOUNDLESS PLAINS HELD A THOUSAND PERILS-- EACH BUSH HID AN ENEMY AND THE HOWLING WINDS CARRIED THE SONG OF DRYGULCH BULLETS, SCREAMING DEATH! IT TOOK GRIT, GUTS AND MEN LIKE STEVE BRAND, -ALIAS THE DURANGO KID - TO COME

"SHOOTIN' THROUGH"

LEM STEVENS! WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE?
I WANT CASH, SUMMERS— RIGHT NOW!

THUH FUST PAYMENT'S DUE ON THET MORTGAGE— AN' I WANT IT!
HOLY SMOKE, STEVENS— WAIT UNTIL AFTER MY FIRST TRIP! YOU KNOW I DON'T HAVE THE MONEY RIGHT NOW!

NOTHIN' DOIN'! I WANT THET CASH NOW—OR I TAKE OVER YORE COMPANY! TWO THOUSAND DOLLARS—NOW!

YOU'LL HAVE YOUR TWO THOUSAND DOLLARS, STEVENS— AS SOON AS I WRITE OUT THIS CHECK!
WHUT THUH—?

TAKE IT, STEVENS. I'M LENDING THE MONEY TO PETE SUMMERS. TAKE IT — AND GET OUT!
STRANGER, I DON'T FANCY YORE TONE OF VOICE — NOBODY TALKS TUH ME THET WAY!

I SAID GET OUT!

STEVE, I CAN'T THANK YOU ENOUGH!
FORGET IT, PETE. MULEY AND I HAVE SOME MONEY SALTED AWAY AND WE CAN AFFORD A LOAN LIKE THAT TO A FRIEND. PAY IT BACK WHENEVER YOU CAN—AND NO INTEREST!

I OUGHT TO PAY IT BACK SOON, STEVE—THAT'S IF THIS TRIP IS SUCCESSFUL. SEE THEM LOADING MAIL? I'VE JUST GOT A *TRIAL BID* FROM THE GOVERNMENT TO CARRY MAIL...

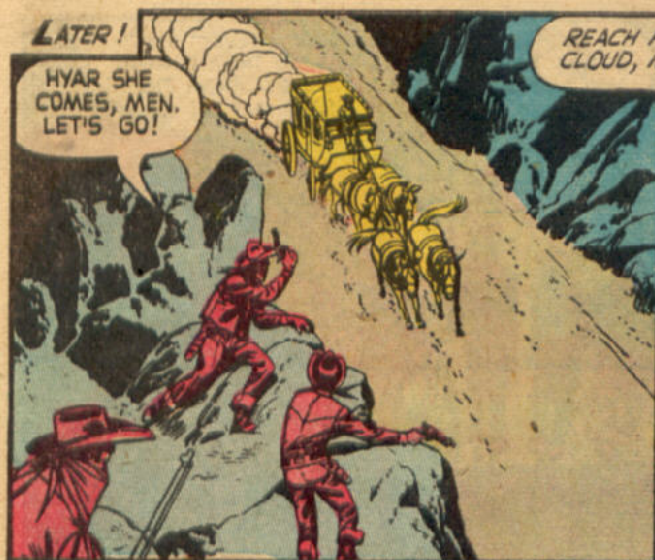
IF I CAN PROVE TO THE GOVERNMENT THAT MY COACHES CAN CARRY THE MAIL SAFELY, I'LL HAVE THE CONTRACT CLINCHED—AND THE LINE WILL BE A SUCCESS!
IT'S A DANDY RIG Y'GOT HYAR, PETE!
MAIL
U.S.

THOSE ARE MY FASTEST HORSES AND THAT'S MY BEST CONCORD COACH—THIS TRIP TO RED HOOK **MUST** GO THROUGH!
IT *WILL*, PETE! WE'LL BE RIDING ALONG, AND WE'LL KEEP OUR EYES PEELED FOR TROUBLE! SO LONG!

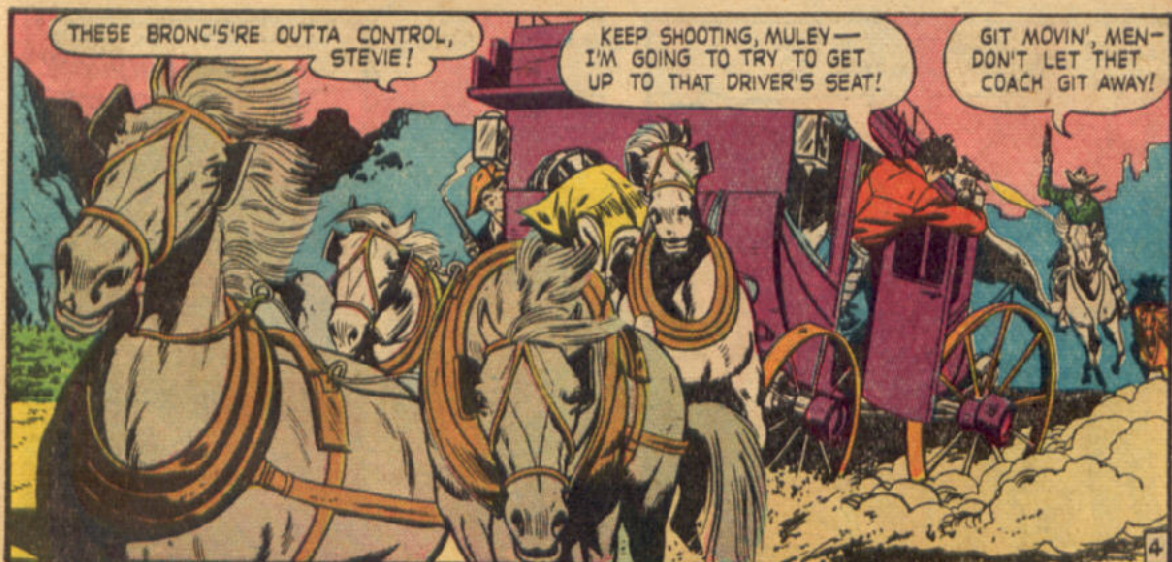
ADIOS!
SO, SUMMERS IS CARRYIN' MAIL ON A TRIAL BID, HUH?

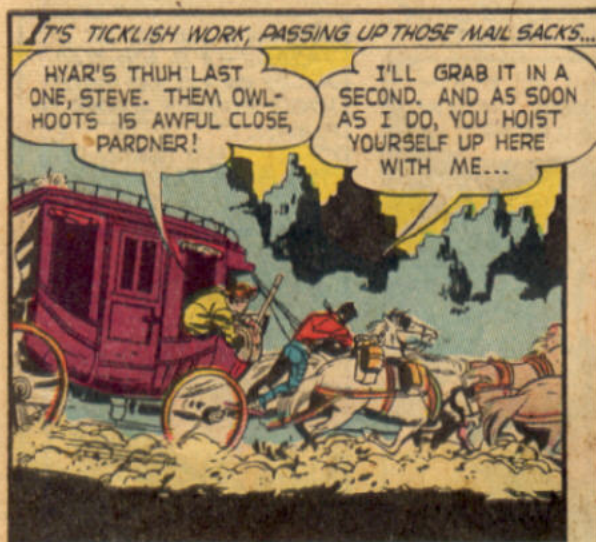
EF'N THET MAIL **DON'T** GO THROUGH, HE'LL LOSE THUH CONTRACT. THET MEANS HE'LL GO BANKRUPT FER SHORE—AN' I KIN BUY 'IM OUT.

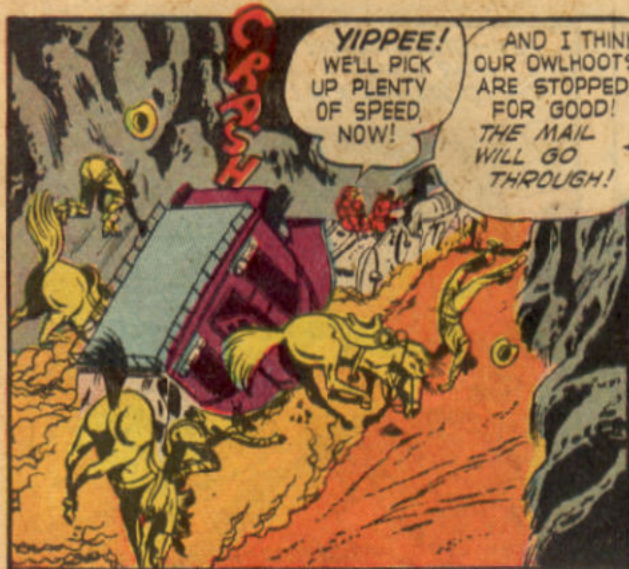
WAL—THET MAIL ***AIN'T GOIN' THROUGH!* GIDDAP!**

LATER!
HYAR SHE COMES, MEN. LET'S GO!
REACH FER A CLOUD, MISTER!
JUMPIN' GOPHERS—ROAD AGENTS!

NIX— I'M REACHIN' FER MY WHIP YUH BLAMED OWLHOOTS! GIDDAP, HOSSES ... RIDE 'EM DOWN!

UGH... THEY GOT ME... MUH CHEST... KEEP GOIN' HOSSES... KEEP... KEEP GOIN' ...UGH...
CRACK!

THESE BRONC'S'RE OUTTA CONTROL, STEVIE!
KEEP SHOOTING, MULEY— I'M GOING TO TRY TO GET UP TO THAT DRIVER'S SEAT!
GIT MOVIN', MEN— DON'T LET THET COACH GIT AWAY!

WELL, AT LEAST THEY MADE THIS COACH STURDY — AND THAT'S A HELP!

THEY'RE *GAININ'* ON US, STEVE! CAIN'T WE HUSTLE NO FASTER?
NOT WITH THIS HEAVY COACH, MULEY. WAIT— I'VE GOT AN IDEA! PASS THOSE MAIL SACKS UP HERE!

IT'S TICKLISH WORK, PASSING UP THOSE MAIL SACKS...
HYAR'S THUH LAST ONE, STEVE. THEM OWL-HOOTS IS AWFUL CLOSE, PARDNER!
I'LL GRAB IT IN A SECOND. AND AS SOON AS I DO, YOU HOIST YOURSELF UP HERE WITH ME...

NOW—THE CONCORD COACH IS A FREE-SWINGING BODY LASHED TO THE RUNNING GEAR ONLY BY THESE LEATHER "THOROUGH-BRACES". IF I CAN CUT THEM —

CRASH
YIPPEE! WE'LL PICK UP PLENTY OF SPEED NOW!
AND I THINK OUR OWLHOOTS ARE STOPPED FOR GOOD! *THE MAIL WILL GO THROUGH!*

RED HOOK— HERE WE COME!

I'M GOING TO TRY TO GET THE DURANGO KID AFTER THOSE DRY-GULCHING ROAD AGENTS!

I SHORE HOPE YUH FIND 'IM, STEVE! WE'LL BE COMING ALONG IN A LICK WITH A POSSE!

JUST A FEW MINUTES LATER... AT A SECRET HIDEOUT...

SHAKE YORE CARCASS, SAM—GIT UP ON THET THAR ROCK. WE'LL SKEDADDLE BEHIND THEM BUSHES —AN' WHEN DURANGO HITS THE TURN— LET 'IM HAVE IT!

HERE WE ARE —WONDER IF THOSE OWLHOOTS ARE STILL AROUND? HEY-DID I SEE THE GLINT OF A GUN UP ON THOSE ROCKS?

CRACK!
CRACK!
I DID!
CRACK
CRACK!

FIRST THING IS TO GET SOME COVER—THAT ARROYO!
PING!
CRACK!
ZING!

MOVE OVER, FROG!
SPANNNNNG!

I WOULDN'T EXACTLY CALL THIS THE BEST SHOOTING POSITION TO BE IN. HMMM... THAT FROG...!

SOME PEOPLE DO MAGIC BY PULLING RABBITS OUT OF HATS — MAYBE I CAN DO A BIT BY PUTTING A FROG INTO MY HAT! START JUMPING, MISTER FROG!

DURANGO AIN'T SO SMART! THET JASPER THINKS HE'S SNEAKIN' AWAY—BUT WE KIN SEE HIS HAT. START CLOSIN' IN ON 'IM, MEN!

GIVE IT TO 'IM, BOYS! BLOW THET RANNIE'S HAID OFF!
BA-BA-BANG! BANG

GULP!
IT-IT JEST AIN'T NATURAL! YUH THINK MEBBE—MEBBE HE'S A WITCH AN' TURNED HISSELF INTUH A FROG—OR SOMEPIN'? HUH?

GUESS AGAIN, HOMBRES!
Yiiiiii!
BA-BANG!

HOW'S THIS FOR A WITCH'S TRICK? —I'LL MAKE YOU FLY, WITHOUT A BROOMSTICK!
GNNNG!

KISS AND MAKE UP, BOYS!
KLUNK!
THERE'S DURANGO, MEN—GUESS THAR AIN'T MUCH LEFT FER US TO DO!

SO YUH WANTED TUH COLLECT, LEM STEVENS? YUH'LL COLLECT PLENTY —IN JAIL!
THE END

THE DURANGO KID

NO MAN'S TOUGH ENOUGH TO BEAT *ME* NOT EVEN—

NOT EVEN **THE DURANGO KID?**

WHEN DEATH BREATHES HARSH AND CLOSE, THERE'S NO TIME FOR FANCY PALAVER. IN A LAND WHERE LAW RIDES A HOT BULLET, A MAN HAS GOT TO LET HIS FISTS AND SIX-SHOOTER DO HIS TALKING FOR HIM. HE'S GOT TO PROVE HE'S —

"TOUGH AS THEY COME!"

YUH NAILED IT, STEVE. I SUSPECT DIRTY WORK WHEN THUH OWLHOOTS—AN' MUH FOREMAN, JEFF RUFFO, JEST AIN'T HANDLIN' THUH SITUATION THE WAY HE SHOULD. THAR GOES RUFFO NOW!

HE'S A MEAN AN' ORNERY RANNIHAN, THET RUFFO, AN' I GOT MY DOUBTS HE'S HONEST. I'D FIRE HIM RIGHT NOW—EXCEPT I'M JEST TOO DURN SICK AN OLD TO PICK A SCRAP WITH HIM!

I'M BAD IN NEED OF A YOUNG, TOUGH FIRECRACKER 'ROUND THUH PLACE TUH SET THINGS TO RIGHT, STEVE. WHAT D'YUH SAY?
I SAY YOU JUST HIRED YOURSELF A BRAND NEW FOREMAN, SI—WITH ASSISTANT!

BUT MULEY AND I HAVE GOT TO DO IT *OUR* WAY!
GO TO IT, STEVE! I'M GIVIN' YOU *UNLIMITED AUTHORITY!* HOT DIGGITY—SHORE WISH I WAS YOUNG AGAIN! GONNA BE A HOT TIME 'ROUND HYAR!

WHAR TO FIRST, STEVIE?
TO THE BUNKHOUSE!

ALL RIGHT, YOU BUNK-WARMING, SADDLE-TICKLERS—HIT THE BOARDS AND GATHER 'ROUND! WE'RE GOING TO HAVE A POW-WOW!
WHUT THUH—WHO ARE *YOU*?

ME? I'M THE BRAND NEW RAMROD IN THIS CORRAL—JUST HIRED BY GUZMAN. BELIEVE ME, GENTS—I'M GOING TO MAKE YOU *SWEAT* FOR YOUR PORK AND BEANS BEFORE I'M THROUGH!

THERE ARE GOING TO BE SOME CHANGES AROUND HERE, MEN—AND ANYONE WHO DOESN'T LIKE THE IDEA CAN START PULLING HIS FREIGHT RIGHT NOW! ANY QUESTIONS?

YEAH — I GOT PLENTY QUESTIONS! JUST HOW TOUGH ARE YUH, HOMBRE? HOW ABOUT SOME PROOF?

GLAD TO OBLIGE!

TOUGH ENOUGH FOR YOU?
ERFFFFF!

ANY *MORE* QUESTIONS?
GNNNNNG!

COLLECT YOUR SADDLE AND BRONC, RUFFO— AND *GET OUT!* YOU'RE *FIRED* AS OF *NOW!*
☆@#!?!

WE'RE WITH YUH, BRAND—ALL THE WAY! IT SHORE WAS SATISFYING SEEIN' RUFFO WHUPPED—AIN'T NONE OF US COTTONED TUH HIM!
THERE'S GOING TO BE A NEW DEAL AROUND HERE, MEN. LET'S GET TO WORK!

A SHORT TIME LATER—AT A NEIGHBORING RANCH...
SO GUZMAN'S NEW RAMROD WHIPPED AND KICKED YOU OUT! AND I'VE BEEN PAYING YOU FOR BEING TOUGH, YOU STUPID JERK! WELL—I'M CUTTING YOUR PAY IN HALF, RIGHT NOW!"

I'VE BEEN PULLING OFF CIRCLE-B STEERS IN A PLAN TO BREAK GUZMAN'S OUTFIT AND BUY HIM OUT! HIS FOREMAN HAS GOT TO BE IN MY PAY!

AS FOR STEVE BRAND—I'VE NEVER YET SEEN THE MUSCLE-MAN WHO DIDN'T HAVE HIS PRICE! OUT OF MY WAY!

LATER—WHEN STEVE RIDES OUT TO SIZE UP THE HERD...
HEY, THERE! YOUR NAME STEVE BRAND?
THAT'S RIGHT, MISTER. STATE YOUR BUSINESS!

MY NAME'S MCBRIDE AND I OWN THE NEXT RANCH. I KNOW GUZMAN JUST HIRED YOU TO RAMROD HIS OUTFIT. I'LL COME RIGHT TO THE POINT, BRAND—I'LL PAY YOU DOUBLE IF YOU'LL WORK FOR ME!

MY GUNS ARE NOT FOR HIRE, MCBRIDE. I WORK FOR WHOEVER I LIKE—AND I DON'T LIKE YOU! NOW—GET OFF THIS RANGE AND STAY OFF! THAT GOES FOR NIGHT-WORK, TOO!
WHY YOU—! NOBODY TALKS TO ME LIKE THAT! I'LL—

WHICH PROVES THAT JEFF RUFFO WAS SPYIN' FER McBRIDE ALL THE TIME—AN THET McBRIDE'S GOT HIS OWN PLANS FOR THUH CIRCLE-B!

EXACTLY! McBRIDE KNOWS THE GAME IS UP, TOO, AFTER HIS MEETING WITH ME!

AND HE'LL SURELY TRY SOME DESPERATE LAST MINUTE PLAY. I'D BETTER GET ALL THE MEN OUT NIGHTHAWKING THE HERD. YOU STICK CLOSE TO SI, MULEY,— PROTECT HIM. AS FOR ME, I THINK THE DURANGO KID WILL RIDE TONIGHT!

THAT NIGHT...
LOOKS LIKE THEY GOT GUYS OUT GUARDIN' THE HERD. WE'LL HAVE TO SHOOT IT OUT, MEN! ...LET'S GO—THEM TINHORNS CAIN'T STACK UP TUH US PERFESSIONALS. WE'LL SLAUGHTER 'EM!

GO GIT 'EM! YAHOOO!

WE GOT 'EM SURPRISED, MEN! WIPE 'EM OUT!

HATE TO RUIN YOUR PLANS, BOYS!
THUH DURANGO KID! YI!!!!!!
BANG! BANG!

WHAT'S THE MATTER, HOMBRE —HEADACHE?
LET'S GO! LET'S GIT OUTA HERE! SCRAM!
KONK!

THEY'RE ON THUH RUN, ALL RIGHT! WOW! I GOT ONE O' THEM!
LET'S SEE WHO IT IS!

IT'S RUFFO!
I'M DYIN'-DYIN'! AN' IT'S ALL THET McBRIDE'S FAULT! THET CUSSED VARMINT CUT MUH PAY... SENT ME OUT WITH ONLY HALF O' THUH MEN... AND NOW...

ONLY HALF THE MEN? WHAT DO YOU MEAN?
THET'S RIGHT. THUH OTHER HALF IS WITH McBRIDE- THEY-GROAN-WENT TUH GIT OLD MAN GUZMAN-GROAN! -I'M DYIN', BOYS- DYIN'!

DEAD! HE CAME TO AN OWLHOOT'S END!
THUNDER! I'D BETTER GET TO THE RANCH HOUSE RIGHT AWAY! THERE IS JUST MULEY THERE -AGAINST A HALF DOZEN GUNSLICKS!

SWIFT AS THE WIND, THE GREAT HORSE, "RAIDER", CARRIES HIS MASTER TO THE CIRCLE-B RANCH HOUSE!
GUZMAN'S GONE! THEY'VE BEEN HERE AND-MULEY! MULEY!

GROAN! DURANGO-YOU'RE HERE AT LAST! I'M JEST NICKED I GUESS-CREASED MUH SKULL A BIT. IT WUZ AWFUL, PARDNER-PLENTY SHOOTIN' ROUND HYAR- THEY TOOK GUZMAN ALONG... LEFT ME FER DAID...

QUICK, MULEY- THE BOYS OUGHT TO BE ALONG SOON. SEND THEM TO McBRIDE'S -FAST! I CAN'T WAIT!
RIDE FAST, DURANGO! I SHORE HOPE YOU'RE NOT TOO LATE!... I THINK I HEAR THUH BOYS COMIN' NOW!

MEANWHILE...

I'M PUTTING IT TO YOU STRAIGHT, GUZMAN! SIGN THIS PAPER THAT TURNS YOUR RANCH OVER TO ME- OR ELSE I'LL SHOOT - AND SHOOT TO KILL!

GO AHEAD AN' SHOOT, YUH MONEY-CRAZY VARMINT! I AIN'T GOIN' TUH LIVE LONG, ANYWAY, AN' I AIN'T AFEARED TO DIE! AN' DIE I WILL AFORE I SEE MUH HARD-EARNED LAND GOIN' TUH A SKUNK LIKE YOU!

ALL RIGHT, GUZMAN— YOU ASKED FOR IT! THIS IS THE END FOR YOU!

YEEEEOW!
WRONG, McBRIDE— IT'S THE END FOR *YOU!*
CRASH!

IT'S THE OWLHOOT'S END FOR YOU AND THE REST OF YOUR GUNSLICK BROOD!
THAT'S WHAT YOU SAY, DURANGO!

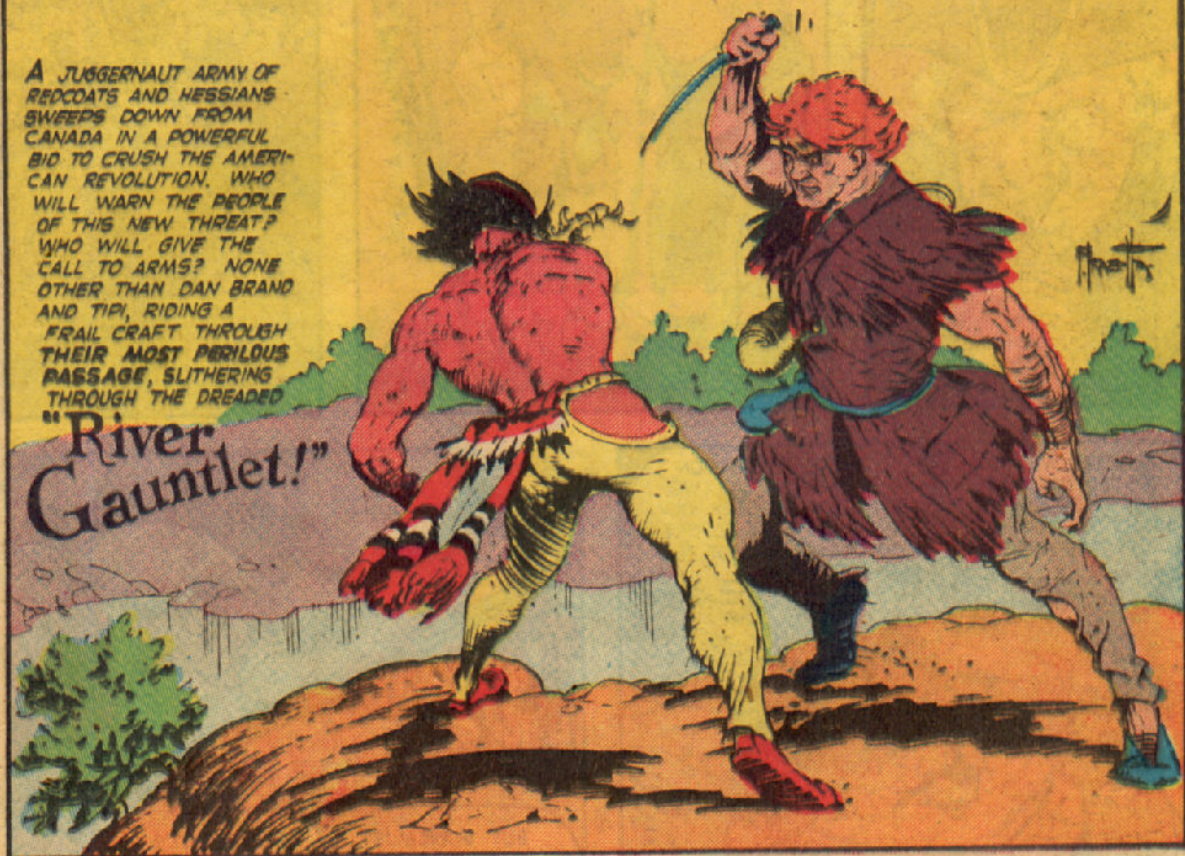
WE GOT HYAR AS SOON AS WE COULD, DURANGO! *MOP 'EM UP, BOYS!*
THAT'S WHAT I SAY, HOMBRE— AND WHAT I *MEAN!*

SLICK WORK, DURANGO! BY JUPITER, I DON'T KNOW WHETHER TUH WILL MY RANCH TUH YOU OR TUH MY FRIEND, STEVE BRAND. CAIN'T TELL WHICH ONE IS *TOUGHER!*

YOU'VE GOT A LONG TIME TO THINK ABOUT THAT, SI GUZMAN. YOUR PLENTY TOUGH YOURSELF, OLD-TIMER, AND YOU'VE GOT MANY MORE LONG YEARS OF PROSPEROUS RANCHING AHEAD!
THE END

Dan Brand and Tipi

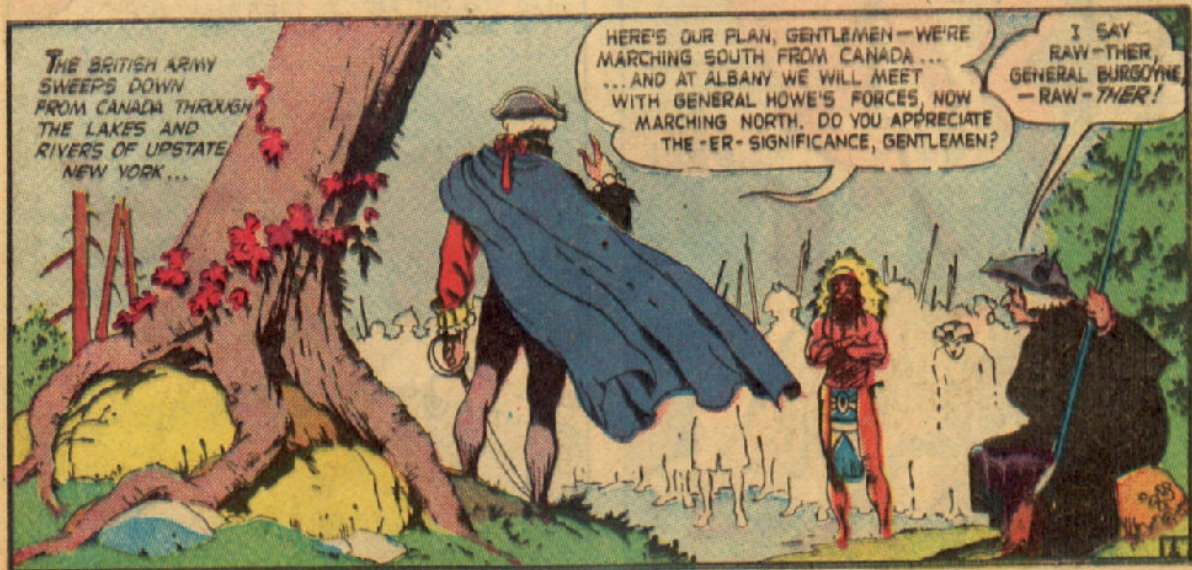
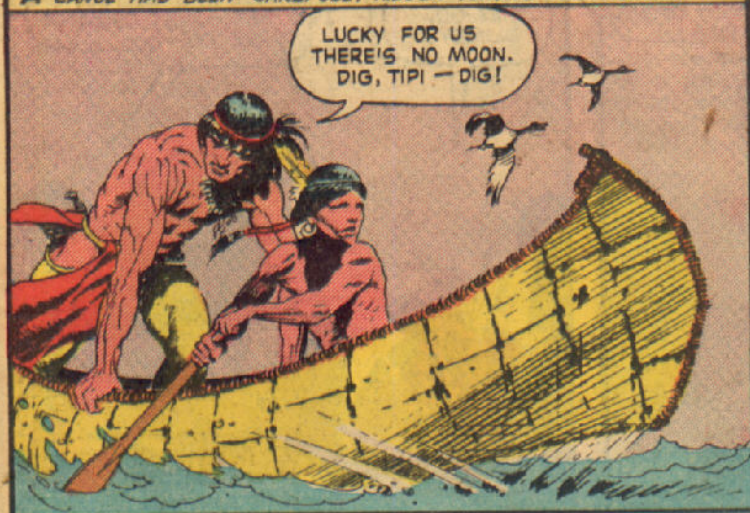
A JUGGERNAUT ARMY OF REDCOATS AND HESSIANS SWEEPS DOWN FROM CANADA IN A POWERFUL BID TO CRUSH THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION. WHO WILL WARN THE PEOPLE OF THIS NEW THREAT? WHO WILL GIVE THE CALL TO ARMS? NONE OTHER THAN DAN BRAND AND TIPI, RIDING A FRAIL CRAFT THROUGH **THEIR MOST PERILOUS PASSAGE**, SLITHERING THROUGH THE DREADED

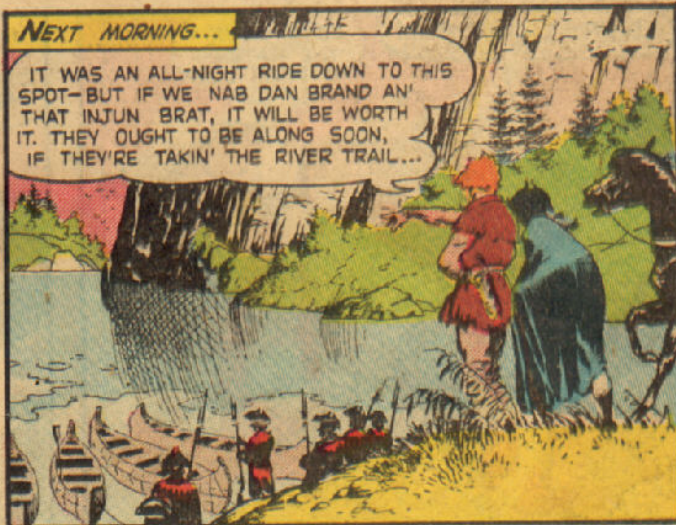
"River Gauntlet!"

BETWEEN US, WE SHALL CRUSH THE REBELS—LIKE A NUT-CRACKER—LIKE THIS! HEH-HEH-HEH!
REMARKABLE! BRILLIANT! WONDERBAR!

LET ME INTRODUCE ABEL BANNIS, WHO HAS AGREED TO SCOUT FOR US THROUGH THESE WILDS. MR. BANNIS IS ONE OF GENERAL WASHINGTON'S BEST SCOUTS.
USED T'BE GEN'RAL BURGOYNE! RIGHT NOW, I'M EMPLOYIN' MY TALENTS WHERE THEY GITS PAID THE MOST!

SO! BANNIS IS SCOUTING FOR THE BRITISH NOW—THE TRAITOR! I'D LIKE TO SETTLE HIS HASH RIGHT HERE AND NOW, BUT THE MOST IMPORTANT THING IS TO GET AWAY FAST AND WARN OUR PEOPLE OF BURGOYNE'S PLAN!

ALREADY WE HAVE WASTED VALUABLE HOURS — WAITING FOR NIGHT TO CLIMB OUT OF THIS TREE...
EVERY PRECAUTION IS NECESSARY, TIPI. WE MUST NOT BE SEEN. OUR MISSION IS TO REPORT INFORMATION, NOT TO FIGHT...

BUT!
'ALT! 'OO GOES THERE?
BUT IF WE MUST FIGHT, WE WILL! HEAD STRAIGHT FOR THE RIVER, TIPI!
BLAZES, IT'S DAN BRAND! STOP THAT MAN! STOP HIM!

A CANOE HAS BEEN CAREFULLY HIDDEN AMONG THE REEDS...
LUCKY FOR US THERE'S NO MOON. DIG, TIPI — DIG!

ZOUNDS, THEY GOT AWAY— DOUBTLESS TO WARN THE REBELS OF OUR PLANS! I SAY WHAT ROTTEN, BLOODY LUCK!
I GOT AN IDEA, GENERAL BURGOYNE...

WITH A FEW SCORE MEN ON HORSEBACK, I'LL BE ABLE TO CUT BRAND OFF FARTHER DOWN THE RIVER BY MORNING. I KNOW WHERE TO BORROW CANOES, TOO!
EXCELLENT! SEE THAT HE DOESN'T GET PAST YOU THIS TIME!

NEXT MORNING...
IT WAS AN ALL-NIGHT RIDE DOWN TO THIS SPOT—BUT IF WE NAB DAN BRAND AN' THAT INJUN BRAT, IT WILL BE WORTH IT. THEY OUGHT TO BE ALONG SOON, IF THEY'RE TAKIN' THE RIVER TRAIL...

HERE THEY COME! SHOVE OFF!

WHAT SHALL WE DO, DAN?
ONLY ONE THING TO DO, TIPI. THEY'VE SET UP A RIVER GAUNTLET — AND WE'LL HAVE TO RUN IT! LET'S GO!

WHAT THE—! WHAT ARE THEY TRYIN' TO DO?
—NOW!

WHERE'D THEY GO, BLIMEY?
DROWNED THEMSELVES, I'LL BET—JUST COULDN'T FACE IT!

YEEOW— I CAN'T SWIM!
COME ON IN, THE WATER'S FINE!

AND NOW—BACK IN OUR CANOE AGAIN. CAREFUL, TIPI, THAT WE DON'T UPSET IT!
STOP! SURRENDER, DAN BRAND! YOU'LL NEVER MAKE IT!

OH, WON'T WE?
I'LL GET YOU, DAN BRAND—I'LL GET YOU YET!

SIT DOWN, BANNIS—YOU'RE ROCKING THE BOAT! DIG HARD, TIPI!
RIGHT, DAN! HERE WE GO—INTO THE RAPIDS!
4

RIGHT THROUGH THEM! THEIR LAST CANOE JUST SCRATCHED ON A ROCK!
YES, BUT LOOK AHEAD— THERE'S THE FALLS!

WE'VE ONLY ONE CHOICE, TIPI! THE SHORE IS LINED WITH BANNIS' MEN—AND WE CAN'T MAKE A PORTAGE HERE! WE'LL HAVE TO RIDE THAT FALLS!
ZING!
ZING!

GOOD LUCK, TIPI! DIVE DEEP!
G-G-GOOD LUCK, DAN! IF ONLY WE MISS THE ROCKS!

NARROWLY, THE ROCKS ARE MISSED! DAN AND TIPI DIVE DEEP—ARCHING BACK UNDER THE CATARACTING WATER..

MADE IT! LUCKY THIS LEDGE WAS HERE. THE FALLS WILL SCREEN US FROM SIGHT!

THEY'RE GONE TO GLORY, MATEY—NO BLOKE COULD STAY UNDER THAT LONG!
THEY'RE DONE FOR, ALL RIGHT! MUST'VE BEEN SMASHED TO BITS ON THE ROCKS DOWN THERE! LET'S GO, MEN!

THEY'RE GONE, ALL RIGHT! MA-LA, BUT I AM COLD!
REPAIRING THIS CANOE WILL WARM US UP. QUICKLY, STRIP SOME BIRCH BARK, GATHER PINE GUM...

...AND...
WE WILL COME BACK, TIPI — SOON! WE WILL GIVE THE TRAITOR'S REWARD TO ABEL BANNIS — SOON — VERY SOON!

A WEEK LATER— SARATOGA!
IF WHAT YOU REPORT IS TRUE, DAN BRAND, BURGOYNE AND HIS REDCOAT SWINE WILL MEET THEIR LAST AMBUSH HERE AT SARATOGA! OUR BRAVE MILITIAMEN ARE READY FOR THEM — ALL AROUND THIS VALLEY!

HERE THEY COME— FIRE!

— AND ATTACK!
FOR COUNTRY AND FOR FREEDOM!

OUT OF MY WAY, REDCOATS — I HAVE OTHER GAME!

ABEL BANNIS— YOUR TRAITOR'S PAYMENT IS DUE!
DAN BRAND! I THOUGHT—

I'M PAYING OUT *DEATH*, BRAND— YIIII!
THEN YOU'VE GOT THE WRONG CUSTOMER, SWINE!

THERE'S MORE THAN ONE WAY TO DO BUSINESS! THIS KNIFE IS ONE!

I'D RATHER TRADE— *PUNCHES!*

DAN! DAN! WE'VE WON! BURGOYNE HAS JUST SURRENDERED!
THIS BATTLE WILL DECIDE THE WHOLE WAR!

AND A COURT-MARTIAL WILL DECIDE WHAT TO DO WITH THAT DESERTER!
YOU SAID WE'D COME BACK FOR HIM, DAN —AND WE DID!
THE END

THE SHELLBELT, with its row of brass-studded cartridges and the walnut-handled Colt sixgun, felt heavy and familiar to sheriff Tate Lucas as he strapped it around his lean waist. His glance caught his face reflected from the broken old mirror in front of which he shaved every morning. His face was lined, grim. His black hair was edged with gray at his temples, and above the ears. *I've been a long time doing this*, he thought to himself. *Buckling on my gun and belt and going out after another young hombre who think he's too fast for any man who wears the star badge.*

He stomped on his worn, highheeled boots across the wooden floor, raising the dust of the last twenty years. His spurs jingled faintly, musically. He'd gotten those spurs down in Nogales, the time he'd gone after Greaser Sam, who held up the Saddle Gap stage ten or twelve years ago. Huh, seemed like only yesterday he was coming in the swinging doors and The Greaser was going for his gun, his dark eyes a little wide with the sudden terror in them. Sooner or later they all got that look in their eyes, he reflected.

Tate Lucas stopped on the worn board walk outside his little office and looked upstreet, seeing the Studebaker wagons and buckboards, the quartermaster wagon from Fort Cobb, the horses reined to the hitchrail in front of the *Prairie Queen* and the *Lilly Girl.*

"Time was, there'd be only horses on the street. Horses, and fifteen saloons instead of just two."

Now there were general stores, two barber shops, a millinery store and a stagecoach depot, with the big false-fronted bank building siding it. *Tate, you're gettin' old*, he told himself. He looked down at his hands, slowly turning them, seeing the fingers still long and powerful, curving to fit gunbutt and trigger — but now he could see lines in them, that the constant blaze of Texas sunlight had put there, after twenty years of riding the brush, chasing owlhoots.

Luke Whittington went by in his rig, calling out and waving a hand. He saw Miz Tucker and Miz Leahy moving into the newfangled photography parlor. Shaking his head, he came out onto the dust of the street and across to Blaze, his pinto. *The town's growing up, and it's passing you by, like it passed the Judas tree they cut down last week so Abner Kraft could put his new food emporium close to the milliner's shop and hardware store.*

Chris Fannin came down off the hitchrail at sight of him. Young Chris said, "Paw sent me 'long to say howdy, sir. He said as how you might like somebody to talk to, up in the Himakapas."

The sheriff smiled wistfully. He remembered the night Chris had been born, eighteen years ago. Weren't many ranches in the valley then. Or stores in town, for that matter. Chris Fannin could shoot the eye out of a rattlesnake's head at three hundred yeards with a Winchester. His Paw and Tate Lucas had started ranching together in the valley. Yancey Fannin had stuck to ranching. Tate had given it up, once he made some money, and since he was fast with a Colt, he took to wearing the star badge. Old Yancey didn't want to lose his checkers opponent — and the 'Pache Kid was reputed a sure bet to down a man who'd seen his best days. So he'd sent his boy along to cover old Tate's trail.

The sheriff said, "I'm just riding to take a look-see, Chris. You copper it that I'll call you when I need you." But his mind whispered, *It's your job to go out into the Himakapas where the Kid is holed in, and eat lead. You can't take this boy with you to die, too!*

Young Chris watched him as he swung into the kak, squinting against the sunlight. He opened his lips, flushed, and looked away. Tate Lucas smiled.

"You go tell yore paw I'll come back at sundown, an' he better be pretty plumb hot tonight. I aim to beat him three checkers games out of five."

Chris chuckled. Range courtesy forbade him to force himself. He shifted the rifle and wondered how this old codger would get it, for the whole Territory knew the 'Pache Kid was death in boots to any man who wore a law badge.

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The sheriff rode out of town and into the morning sunlight shelving down off the slopes of the Lower Himakapas. His Win-

chester rubbed his knee in its worn, cracked-leather saddle sheath. His old Colt was a comforting weight on his right hip. He sniffed in the pine-scented air, and loosened the buttons of his range jacket.

The 'Pache Kid was a killer. He'd robbed two trains and twenty stages, and one bank. He was wanted for murdering a widow and her two children for thirty-five double eagles. He carried two rifles and three revolvers, a hunting knife and a tomahawk. He shot first and never stopped to ask questions. Rumor had it that among his nine victims were three sheriffs and a Texas Ranger. Tate strongly doubted that the Kid had ever shot and killed a sheriff, much less a Ranger.

"He's young," Tate told his pinto. "Not nineteen yet, an' wild as a unbroke Morgan horse. Mebbeso he killed two white men. Mebbe even three, four greasers. The rest was Injuns — an' not wild ones, at that."

Tate Lucas had a magnificent scorn for the "modern" bad man. He had ridden stirrup to stirrup with Wild Bild Hickok and John Wesley Hardin. He'd seen Billy Tilghman throw down on the notorious Bill Doolin. Even when he'd been covered by an outlaw's guns in the past, Tate Lucas had been cool, confident.

"They go bad too young now," he was fond of telling Yancey Fannin. "They don't take the time to learn their trade."

That was all he had — the confidence of a man grown tired under the weight of a sheriff's badge, and a gun that seldom missed — if he got the chance to use it.

He swung the pinto's head toward the timber belt and urged him to a lope.

The pinto came out from the shadow of the lava rock as the bullet took off in a riccochet an inch from his left foreleg, and went *spannnging* into the sky. The saddle creaked, and a shadow moved, and then Tate Lucas lay belly-down, with a rifle cuddled under his chin. His alert blue eyes went dancing from rock to rock above him.

He saw the shadow move, and fired. A yelp of surprise answered him. Might be he was giving away a hole card by letting the Kid know what he could do with a rifle, but he couldn't resist. Take the Kid down a peg or two in his own estimation. Teach the Kid a bit of respect for the star badge!

He inched forward, sliding so that his back was protected by a jutting lip of rock above him. He moved like an Indian, so quietly that no sound bothered the chirp-chirp of a road-runner. Idly he watched the little bird dart and circle, then race off. He was joined by two more, and they moved into the rocks.

With a plainsman's eye, Tate saw the moulted feathers here and there on the rocks, wherever he looked. He slid on, rifle in his hand.

Fully an hour later, he was less than a hundred yards from his head-drooping pinto pony. But he was fifty feet higher than he had been, and much of the rocky formation of the Himakapas lay under him. He squirmed closer to the rock, seeking the last bit of shade he could find, against the hot bite of the nooning sun. *It's sit and wait, now,* he said to himself. *One of us is goin' to get plumb impatient right soon — but it ain't goin' to be me!*

★

The 'Pache Kid dozed fitfully in the little cavemouth. He was part Indian, and patience flowed with the blood in his veins. He could lie here and doze for hours. He lifted his head slightly, staring around him, at the sun-baked rocks, at the nodding pinto two hundred yards away.

He turned lazily to settle himself more comfortably when he heard the vicious *whirrrr* of an angry rattler.

"Por Dios!" he snarled under his breath, and shifted position abruptly, his cheeks whitening under their habitual bronze.

He looked around and saw no snake. He snorted. Again the rattles whirred, dry and crisp like fall leaves in a breeze, scurrying across the ground.

"Better git 'em up, son," said a kindly voice.

The 'Pache Kid whirled and cursed. Tate Lucas stood less than ten feet above him, on a rock overhang, a Colt trained on the Kid's middle. In his hand was a long string, and tied to that, the dried remains of a rattlesnake's rattles. He whirred them again, and grinned.

The 'Pache kid went for his gun. Tate waited until he got it out, then he shot him. He shot to kill, remembering the widow and her two sons. The Kid slid down and lay there, still and silent.

Tate said, "Trouble with you young fellers is, you never take time to learn yore trade. Where there's road-runners, you'll never find rattlesnakes. The runners eat 'em. So many runners 'round these rocks a self-respecting rattler wouldn't stand a chance."

He blew smoke from his gun and Colt and inserted a new shell. He was hot and sweaty. He'd have time for a swim in the creek, if he hurried. He didn't want to be late for his checkers game with Yancey Fannin. That was the only fun he had, any more. The rest of it — chasin' young owlhoots too green to know their business—was gettin' so easy it was boring.

Tate whistled for the Pinto and began moving down the rock.

THE END

The DURANGO KID

THE DAILY STAGE ROLLS SWIFTLY DOWN THE WINDING ROAD, LITTLE SUSPECTING THE DANGER AHEAD. SUDDENLY...

KA-ROOOOM!

THE NEW TERROR HAS STRUCK, WITHOUT WARNING, TERRIBLE AND FINAL! THIS IS NOT THE FIRST TIME— NOR WILL IT BE THE LAST. THE NEXT TIME, THE DURANGO KID WILL BE THE TARGET OF THE

"DYNAMITE DOOM!"

ALL DYNAMITING EQUIPMENT IS REGISTERED WITH THE SHERIFF. AND THE ONLY PLACE AROUND HERE WHERE THERE IS DYNAMITE IS IN THE *SILVER LADY MINE*...

WHOEVER'S BEEN CARRYING ON THIS DYNAMITE TERROR *HAD* TO STEAL HIS EQUIPMENT FROM THIS MINE. HE MAY EVEN WORK HERE...!

MY BLACK CLOTHES SURE BLEND WITH THESE SHADOWS, ALL RIGHT... NOW TO FIND WHERE THEY KEEP THE DYNAMITE. I AIM TO WATCH THAT STOREROOM EVEN IF IT TAKES A WEEK!

THERE IT IS! NOW TO SEE WHO GOES IN AND OUT. THERE'S A DARK LITTLE NICHE I CAN WATCH FROM...
BLASTING EQUIPMENT
DANGER!
UNAUTHORIZED PERSONS

ALL RIGHT, YOU—*REACH!* GIT YORE HANDS UP AN HOLD 'EM THAR!

I'LL REACH ALL RIGHT— *FOR YOU!*

PARDON MY REACH, PLEASE!

WELL, I'LL BE—! GEOFFREYS—THE OWNER OF THE SILVER LADY!
DURN RIGHT I OWN THIS HERE MINE, DURANGO! WHUT YUH DOIN' STEALIN' MUH BLASTIN' EQUIPMENT?

SOMEBODY'S BEEN STEALIN' DYNAMITE AN' PLUNGERS FROM HERE. I'VE BEEN WATCHIN' HYAR TUH SEE WHO IT WAS. SO IT WUZ YOU, DURANGO!
NO, GEOFFREYS, IT WASN'T I!

I'M HERE FOR THE SAME REASON AS YOU—TO SEE WHO'S TAKING EQUIPMENT FROM THAT ROOM. I'M ON THE TRACK OF THE DYNAMITE KILLER! SAY—WHO'S THAT?
THAT'S MY MINE FOREMAN, SAM BARNES!

BARNES IS THUH ONLY ONE I ALLOW IN THAR! HEY—D'YUH THINK—MEBBE HE COULD BE THUH ONE?
COULD BE, COULD BE. AT ANY RATE, SAM BARNES CAN STAND A BIT OF CLOSE WATCHING!

LATER THAT NIGHT...
SO FAR, HE'S DONE NOTHING SUSPICIOUS—CAME RIGHT HOME AND SETTLED DOWN OVER A BOOK. THINK I'LL GET INTO THE NEXT ROOM AND POKE AROUND A BIT...

SOMETHING—SOMETHING IS SURE GIVING ME A CREEPY FEELING...LIKE SOME IMPENDING DOOM ...A SIXTH SENSE! MAYBE I'D BETTER LAY LOW—UNDER THAT BED..!

SUDDENLY...
KA-ROOOOOM!

WHEN THE DUST HAS SETTLED...
LUCKY I DELVED UNDER THIS BED... THE MATTRESS SAVED ME! WHAT A BLAST — WHEW! STILL GROGGY...

BETTER PLUG 'IM, ANYWAY. CAIN'T TAKE NO CHANCE ON HIS BEIN' ALIVE. AND THEN — FER DURANGO!
WHAT THE ...?

THAT GUN WON'T BE OF ANY USE TO YOU, ANYMORE, POLECAT!
Yiiiii!

I'VE GOT YOU NOW, KILLER!
THUH EXPLOSION BLASTED THUH PLASTER INTO FINE POWDER. I'LL GRAB A HANDFUL OF IT AN'-

RECKON THIS'LL FIX YUH, DURANGO!
MY EYES— BLINDED!

HEH-HEH-HEH-HEH-HEH! YOU'LL NEVER FIND OUT WHO I AM, DURANGO — YUH'RE TOO BLIND! HEH-HEH-HEH!

THE SOUND OF RUNNING WATER ... MUST BE A STREAM HERE ... GOT TO BATHE MY EYES...

THIS IS THE LAST TIME I'LL BE TRICKED LIKE THAT. BUT FIRST — TO SEE IF BARNES IS ALL RIGHT...

WHA-WHAT HAPPENED? THET EXPLOSION...
TAKE IT EASY, BARNES — YOU'LL BE ALL RIGHT, NOTHING BROKEN! YOU'LL NEVER KNOW JUST HOW CLOSE TO DEATH YOU WERE!

I'LL BE BACK — RIGHT AFTER I GET THE SKUNK WHO DID THIS! WHAT A FOOL I'VE BEEN!

AND THIS TIME — I KNOW JUST EXACTLY WHERE TO GO! THERE'S ONLY ONE PERSON WHO KNEW I WAS MISTAKENLY TRAILING BARNES!

HELLO, GEOFFREYS!
DURANGO! WELL — ANY LUCK?

PLENTY OF LUCK, GEOFFREYS, I KNOW THE DYNAMITE KILLER!
YUH DON'T SAY! YUH MEAN IT WUZ BARNES?

NO — THE DYNAMITE KILLER IS YOU!
YUH'RE CRAZIER'N A LOON, DURANGO! YUH GOT NO PROOF O'THAT!

YOU THOUGHT PRETTY FAST IN THE MINE THIS MORNING, GEOFFREYS, AND YOU THOUGHT FAST WHEN YOU THREW PLASTER POWDER IN MY EYES A WHILE AGO — BUT YOU DIDN'T THINK FAST ENOUGH TO WIPE THAT PLASTER POWDER OFF YOUR SHOES! PROOF ENOUGH?
BLAZES!

I THOUGHT FAST ENOUGH TO KEEP A GUN UNDER THIS PAPER, DURANGO! AS FER YOU — YOU JEST AIN'T GONNA THINK AGAIN!

THAT'S WHAT YOU THINK!
YEEEOW!

NOW LET'S SEE HOW FAST YOUR FISTS ARE, KILLER!

GO AHEAD, GEOFFREYS — THINK FAST NOW!

WHAT'S THE MATTER? NOTHING TO SAY? TOOTHACHE?
GNNNNG!

LATER...
GUESS I WUZ JEST TOO SMART FER MY OWN GOOD!
THAT'S THE ONE REALLY SMART THING YOU'VE SAID, GEOFFREYS — TOO LATE NOW...!
THE END